

CHAPTER VI

MARRIAGE

Reviewing the marriage ceremonies observed by the Georgian Highlanders, we notice three distinct main parts in the procedure: the match-making, the betrothal, and the wedding.

The marriage is not a private but a communal affair: it represents a contract. The contracting parties are not separate individuals but social groups of families, or even whole communities. All relatives of the young pair take an active interest in the business. The family of the bride is interested not only in receiving the bride-price from the bridegroom, but also in the personality of the groom and the possible advantages of the union for the entire group. On the other side, the relatives of the bridegroom are busy supplying him with the necessary resources in order to meet the expenses of the celebration attendant upon all marriage ceremonies, so that in this case also we have the clearly marked group solidarity manifested in the assistance given the individual by the group as a whole. This last-mentioned trait of communal support of the bridegroom by his kinsmen is characteristic of all groups of Georgian Highlanders.

Although a certain amount of the bride-price must be paid by the man in acquiring his wife in the communities of the Georgian Highlanders, nevertheless we cannot say that they follow the practice of marriage by purchase as is done by other mountaineers of the Caucasus. The price paid by the Georgian for his bride is a minimum amount and is far outweighed by the special gifts presented to the bride by her relatives and friends, and by the dowry of the bride which represents her personal capital (called *sathavno*) and which she brings with her to the home of her future husband.

Contrary to the custom of the Georgians, the bride-price among the other mountaineers of the Caucasus has a strictly established value, paid in money or its equivalent in nature, and representing marriage by purchase. For the sake of comparison, let us consider

583 the valuation and nature of payment of the bride-price as practiced
171 by some of these peoples.¹ In examining the data we see that among the peoples with developed and stratified social organization the bride-price also varies, usually according to the social standing of the bride and according to such personal qualities as beauty, age, and whether she is a widow or single woman.

The amount of *kalim* paid for the bride was evaluated lately in Russian rubles: The Circassians adopted this medium of evaluation after the Russian conquest of the Caucasus, as may be seen from the fact that payment was made in rubles. However, prior to the time of Russian domination, there was no monetary system and all transactions, including the payment of the bride-price, were made in nature. The standard of value varied among the different peoples of the Caucasus. It represented the most valued objects of the country in question, but payment was usually made with common objects.² Thus, among the Circassians the payment to be made was valued in arms and was paid out *de facto* with slaves.

582 Here, for example, is the table of *kalim* paid for a Circassian princess
567 valued in arms and paid for with women slaves, in number
171 from six to fifteen:

- (1) The best coat of mail valued at two women slaves.
- (2) Another coat of mail valued at one woman slave.
- (3) Arm mails—one woman slave.
- (4) Arm mails and helmet—one woman slave.
- (5) Sword—one woman slave.
- (6) Sword (ordinary, simpler than the previous one)—one woman slave.
- (7) Five horses—five women slaves. The value of each horse was equivalent to a woman slave.

582 Thus the *kalim* for a Circassian princess consisted of from six
171 to fifteen women slaves, and sometimes even more. For the daughter of a nobleman (*uzden*), the *kalim* was from 800 to 1,200 rubles, and for a peasant girl from 200 to 600 rubles. With the passage of time and changes in living conditions, the amount of the bride-price (*kalim*) was changed, so that at the end of the

¹ Malinin: 21-61.

² See details in the section dealing with "weregeld."

Marriage

65

nineteenth century the *kalim* paid for a princess amounted to 500⁵²³ rubles, and for widows, 300 rubles; for the daughter of a first-¹⁷¹ grade nobleman (*uzdens* of the first rank), 350 rubles; and for widows, 200 rubles.

Among the Circassian tribes of Shapsugs and Natukhais the *kalim* paid for a princess consisted of from 50 to 60 *skha*; and for a common girl, 25 *skha*. The standard value of a *skha* was approximately 60 to 80 oxen. Among those Circassian groups which had no gradations in the social scale, *kalim* could be paid with slave boys and girls; thus a princess cost from three to eight boys or girls, and a girl of common origin, one or two. In case slave children were not available, the *kalim* could be paid with a certain number of cattle or other domestic animals.

Among the Kabardians after the Russian conquest, the bride-price for a princess was 1,500 rubles; for the princess of a not-powerful family, 700 to 1,000 rubles; for the daughter of an *uzden*, 400 to 1,000 rubles; for a common girl, not more than 300 rubles.

Among the Chechens of Daghestan the bride-price is called *urdali*. The highest amount paid for a bride was 250 rubles, but in the time of Shamol, according to his orders, the bride-price was reduced until it reached the low figure of two cows.

Among the Ossets the bride-price is called *irad*, and was once very high, reaching even 1,000 rubles or 100 oxen in amount, but since the Russian conquest of the Caucasus it has declined in value, amounting in some Ossetic communities to the sum of 440 rubles. In 1866 a special meeting was held of the three communities of northern Ossetia, where the normal amount of the bride-price (*irad*) was fixed at 200 rubles. Formerly, in cases where the groom had no means to pay for his bride, he could pay with his labor. He was obliged to work for the family of his future wife for eight years.

The bride-price is paid by the Pshavs generally with cows: from ⁵⁸⁴ three to five cows for a single girl and not more than three cows ^[583] for a widow. A Pshav girl normally marries at the age of 17 to 20 years. In the old times the choice of a husband was made by her parents and she was obliged to marry the man of their

Marriage

67

the girl is later given to the groom after the refusal, the indemnity⁵⁸⁴ required is only half the original—eight cows.

In a breach of promise case the bridegroom has two ways of acting, either to kidnap the girl or to appeal to the popular justice at the national shrine, *Khati* of *Lashris jvari*. The attendants of the sanctuary, the *khevis-beri*, and the elders of the community act as judges. If the bridegroom is able to prove with the testimony of witnesses that he received a promise from the parents of the girl and the accomplishment of the betrothal, then the bride is awarded to him and the girl has no right to oppose the decision of the tribunal. It is necessary to mention that the bride is not present at the proceedings of the court, and everything is done in her absence and without asking her consent about the matter.

If the girl is abducted after her betrothal by another man, the ravisher has to pay the fine of fifteen cows and the girl's parents are freed from the obligatory payment. And the girl is punished by her parents through their officially excluding her from the native community, usually for a term of two years, although the time can be made shorter. This custom is known under the name of *moikvethavs*. The exclusion from the community is regarded as heavy punishment, having not only an economic but principally a moral and religious foundation, leaving the individual without any support or protection. This is not difficult to understand if we take into consideration the structure of the social organization, the importance of religion in the communal life and the position of the individual in society.

The first step of the reconciliation is for the abductor of the girl to send an envoy to the parents of the girl with a special present consisting of an ox and a sheep, called *khar-tskhviri* from the Georgian words *khari* (ox) and *tskhviri*, meaning a sheep. Besides the *khar-tskhviri*, he has to pay also the *saupatio jarima* mentioned above.

The kidnaping of a woman is regarded by the Pshavs, and⁵⁸³ ● generally by all groups of the Georgian Highlanders, as a disgrace,⁶²⁸ not only to the woman's family, but to the whole of her community, and therefore, immediately after the abduction, the young people of the village take their pursuit, well armed and ready to fight.

- 513 Frequently there are bloody encounters if the pursuers succeed
 629 in overtaking the fugitives. The pursuit is continued till the precincts of the village of the ravishers are reached. After this the kinsmen of the woman enter into negotiations with the kidnaper and usually the affair ends with the payment of indemnity and obligations as decreed by custom. Favorable results in negotiations are easily reached if the abduction has been made with the consent of the woman; in the contrary, the procedure is complicated and continues for a long time, with bloody encounters. And in the kidnaping of a married woman the consequence is the blood feud in which take part, not only the family of the woman but all the community, and the only satisfaction in this case is the death of the culprit and the return of the woman. As an illustration, we may cite a passage from the work of I. A. Bartolomei,³ who during a journey in Svanetia was cordially entertained by the nobleman, Dadash Japaridze, who was not himself taking part in the general good time and conversation. "He related to me the cause of his grief," writes Bartolomei; "his house was deeply offended, requiring bloodshed and vengeance. Not long ago the young wife of his son was kidnaped by a nobleman from Lechkhum. Until she is returned, the family of Japaridze will be covered with a shameful stain which cannot be washed away even with blood. 'If the whole of this mountain,' said the old man to me, pointing out the mountain Elbrus at the foot of which we were staying, 'were transformed into gold and given to me in exchange for my dishonor—even then I would not be satisfied. God sees we are real Christians, but we cannot bear the insult to our family and until they return to me my daughter I will revenge till the last breath of my life.'"

514
 529

In order to avoid the grave consequences of the abduction of a bride, the Pshavs have as a remedy the custom of announcing in public gatherings the betrothal of certain couples. This custom is called the *kvethilshi chasma*. If a girl announces publicly as the betrothed of a certain man that she does not like him, she has the right not to marry him, according to the custom prevailing for

³ Bartolomei: 99.

Marriage

77

Concerning the Tushes, neighbors of the Khevsurs, their marriage ceremonies as well as their other customs are almost identical. Characteristic are the views of Professor A. Kharkhanov concerning the customs dealing with marriage among the Tushes.

"Tushes, like the other mountaineers," writes Professor Khakhanov,¹⁴ "not so long ago had the custom of stealing their brides. The administration is gradually forcing out this kind of marriage, but it has not yet succeeded in abolishing it. The signs of this tradition may be traced even in the marriage proceedings conducted by the clergy of the Georgian Orthodox Church. Thus, for example, when the groom goes to take his bride into the church, she is hidden in a remote room of the house and in order to see her the groom must bribe one of the bride's female relatives. The second indication of the ancient custom we see in the following: during the return of the young couple from the church after the wedding to the house of the groom, they are not permitted to enter until the bride's attendants extinguish with gunfire the burning torches in the yard. The peaceful followers of the bride represent the intimidation of the pursuers of the rapacious ravisher of the young Tush woman and the custom of shooting on the torches indicates the former bloody firings between the abductor of the bride and her relatives. When the aim (the extinguishing of the *fakels*) is attained, the guests are invited to supper. They give presents of money to the bride, and woolen socks to the groom. On the second day the veil which hides the face of the bride from the curious eyes of the Tushes is taken away, and on the third day (after the wedding) she returns to the house of her father, where she stays sometimes weeks, months, or even years, and only after the expiration of a certain time does the husband take her into his home."

Describing the marriage ceremonies among the Tushes, Professor Khakhanov interprets the established customs in such a manner, which in our opinion is in error. Thus the custom of extinguishing the burning *fakels* with gunshots by the bride's

¹⁴ Khakhanov: a, 48-9.

523 followers does not represent at all the survival of the supposed
789 former bloody encounters between the ravisher and his party and the bride's kinsmen, which the author thinks took place when the "custom" of marriage was by capture; but it may have a purely religio-magical explanation, like the customary firings of guns used by the Georgians at the time of childbirth, upon the married couple's departure from the church and after the wedding, and on the dawn of the first day of a new year; while the same explanation applies to the custom of firing guns during an eclipse of the sun.

847 If the economic conditions and the rigorous struggle for existence, as mentioned above, compel the Khevsurs² to limit artificially the number of their children, the same conditions compel the Svans to take more drastic steps than the practice of abortion in controlling the birth rate, to practice the infanticide.

513 Among the Svans, as among the Khevsurs, the young people are engaged to marry in their early childhood, and there are even cases when the engagement takes place before the birth of the couple, when two friendly families decide to intermarry their children before they are born, in order to strengthen their amicable relations. All the necessary arrangements for the marriage are made by the parents of the young people, whose personal feelings are totally ignored.

The first step in the marriage is the match-making, when the parents of the bride receive from the parents of the groom one ruble or a bullet as a token of agreement. Later the betrothal is performed, consisting of the payment of two sheep or an ox or a cow, and is called *nakdanur*. After the *nakdanur* is given, before the wedding, the groom is obliged to pay for his future wife the special bride-price, called *nachvlash*. The *nachvlash* is paid by the groom himself or by his parents. His kinsmen do not assist him, as is the case among the other groups of Georgian Highlanders. The *nachvlash* consists, among the common people, of from 100 to 200 rubles, and among the upper class—the nobility, called *asnauri*—the bride-price is twice as large, i. e., 200 to 400 rubles. According to the data furnished by Margiani,¹⁸ the amount of the

¹⁸ Margiani: 76.

2 [See cat. 116, p 76 - Anal. 7]

Marriage

79

nachvlash by the commoners reached 120 rubles, and among the *asnauri*, 240 rubles. Although the payment of the *nachvlash* was forbidden by the authorities in 1885, it did not cease to be practiced by the people.

In spite of the existence of the obligatory payment of the bride-price by the Svan groom, we cannot consider this practice as marriage by purchase, because of the large amount of dowry given to the bride by her relatives.

After the payment of the *nakdanur* and the *nachvlash*, the bride is regarded as belonging to the groom. In case of her desertion or the breaking of their word by the bride's parents, the result is a blood feud or the return of everything given to the bride in addition to the payment of indemnity. Thus marriage among the Svans, as among the other Georgian Highlanders, has the character of a legal business transaction—a contract.

The dowry (*msithvi*) which the bride brings to the home of her husband, usually exceeds the bride-price. The dowry is formed usually of cattle (cows, horses, sheep), large copper cooking pots, clothing and adornments for the bride such as ear-rings, beads, rings, etc. Land is given as a dowry only when the bride-price (*nachvlash*) is paid by the groom in land. In addition to the dowry, the bride brings with her two oxen-loads of bread and brandy for the relatives of the groom.

Considering the large amount of dowry and the additional expense necessary for the marriage ceremonies which falls heavily upon the bride's family, it is not difficult to understand the current opinion among the Svans that a woman is a source of great expense and material loss for the entire family. This fact, together with the economic conditions of the country, may be were responsible for the practice of infanticide by the Svans, when newborn baby girls were put to death.

The reason for the preference given to boys over girls as expressed in the custom of infanticide is not difficult to comprehend if, in addition to the facts stated above, one takes into consideration the structure of the social organization where every male member is not only the defender of the material and moral interests of the family but is also the sustainer of its physical existence and the

147 were rewarded by God with the birth of babies of the male sex as the answer to their prayers . . ."

- 523 The practice of infanticide was also responsible for the custom of marriage by abduction, practiced by the Svans. By putting to death the baby girls, there was a consequent shortage of marriageable women. The tables of statistics given above clearly indicate the acuteness of the situation. Thus the table furnished by N. Dmitriev² dealing with the distribution of the population in the communities of Free Svanetia shows that of the total population of 5,801, there are 3,116 males and 2,685 females, which makes 431 fewer women than men. We find the same situation when we consult the tables prepared by V. J. Teptsov. In consequence of this situation the men were obliged to resort to kidnaping and abduction in order to obtain a mate. I. A. Bartolomei and D. Z. Bakradze justly observe that infanticide is responsible for the custom of bride-stealing and abduction. Relating the gradual abandonment by the Svans of the practice of infanticide, Mr. Bartolomei adds:³⁰ "They told me it would not be necessary for our sons to buy or steal wives for themselves beyond the mountains." D. Z. Bakradze³¹ expresses the same opinion. "The result of this custom," he writes, referring to infanticide, "was a diminution in the number of women and the consequent necessity for bride-abduction and the kidnaping of the wives of other men."

- [422] The result of the kidnaping of a woman among the Svans was a blood-feud (*litskup*) with all its grave results; or, if an agreement was reached, the payment of indemnity by the abductor consisting of half the amount of the blood-money, called *tsor*, to remove the dishonor, and in addition the usual bride-price (*nachvlash*) in full. On the other hand, when a Svan stole a woman from a neighboring tribe, he was not prosecuted and his action was not even viewed as a crime.

The bride-stealing—marriage by capture—was practiced not only by the Svans but also by all other groups of the Georgian Highlanders and by the Georgians of the Lowlands as well.

³⁰ Bartolomei: 160.

³¹ Bakradze: 46.

2 [See cat. no. 884--Analyst]

Marriage

87

If we examine this "custom"¹ and take the facts connected with it as they are in reality at the present time, or were not long ago in the Caucasus, without constructing artificial theories we come to the conclusion that marriage by capture and abduction is not the relic of an ancient institution but the origin and very existence of this "custom" are traceable to various economic, religious, and psycho-sociological factors. Thus in Svanetia the economic conditions were chiefly responsible for the practice of infanticide, which in its turn was the principal cause of bride-stealing and abduction. In addition to the economic causes, the procedure of the marriage ceremonies, particularly the authority of parents in the matchmaking, led to and kept in existence the practice of bride-abduction and marriage by capture, which were mostly accomplished by mutual consent and previous arrangement of the young people, a practice prevailing among all groups of Georgian Highlanders. Therefore the marriage by abduction or by capture in the Caucasus was in many instances a love match; a marriage based on the mutual love of the young couple acting in defiance of the rigid rules of custom and parental will, and according to their own will and sexual inclination; or, on the other hand, we have the abduction of a woman by force, without her consent, as in the previous case. Here we have, as a motive for abduction, the feeling of one party only—the man—who, blinded by passion, adopts a "devil-may-care" attitude, ignoring the usual consequences of such an act, the inevitable blood-feud. So, analyzing the cases of bride abduction among the Georgian Highlanders, we come to the conclusion that they are motivated not by custom but by personal inclinations of the persons involved, who act, not according to custom, but from sheer necessity. Consequently, marriage by capture is not a "custom," but a necessity; because "the word custom is used to apply to the totality of behavior patterns which are carried by tradition and lodged in the group, as contrasted with the more random personal activities of the individual."²

We may follow without difficulty the fact proving the validity of our opinion that, with the growing personal liberty of young people and the diminishing power of parental authority in

¹ Sapir: 658. *g[he, marriage by capture--Analyst]*

- 575 arranging marriages, the number of marriages by abduction is
162 diminishing rapidly in the various communities.

[575] It should be noted, also, that the practice of firing guns, as part of the wedding ceremony,³ is not an indication of the earlier custom of marriage by abduction, when the groom and his kinsmen frequently had to use their firearms; but is merely of religio-magical origin. It is done, as the people believe, to keep the evil spirits away from the married pair.

565 In examining the marriage procedure as performed by the Svans, we discussed briefly the ceremonies of matchmaking and betrothal and the facts connected with them.⁴ After the betrothal the wedding ceremony takes place.

Among the Svans the wedding is performed by their illiterate priests, called *papi*. The procedure is a mixture of the Christian ceremonies of the Georgian Church and additional rites which originated in the people's superstition and phantasy. Thus, for example, instead of holding crowns over the heads of the marrying couple, as in the Georgian Church, the Svans use chintz caps specially made for the occasion. The prayers are read in the Georgian language but their meaning is not understood by the people. One prayer is interwoven with another and badly distorted. As a characteristic feature of the ceremony, we must note the ceremonial kissing of the bride and groom, and the sewing of their garments with a needle by the *papi*.

After the wedding ceremony the celebration is arranged in the house of the groom. The bride is led into the house with veiled face. The veil is discarded at the entrance after the bride passes the threshold. The bride passes under crossed daggers—a universal custom among all Georgians and practiced as a protection against the evil spirits. The bride is met in the door by the near relatives of the groom with a cup full of wheat flour—the symbol of abundance and prosperity. The bride takes the cup and slowly walks with it in her hands around the room. Then she is led to the cup containing honey, which she must taste by dipping her finger in it. This custom of giving honey to the bride is universal among all groups of the Georgian nation, and may be interpreted as the symbol of a sweet future conjugal life. After

¹ [See cat. 116, p 77 -- Analyst]
² [See cat. 116, p 78 ff -- Analyst]